



THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

NONPROFIT SECTOR RESEARCH FUND

# PROPOSAL GUIDELINES

Research on U.S. Community Foundations

Applications Must Be Postmarked  
By July 25, 2003

# NONPROFIT SECTOR RESEARCH FUND REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

## RESEARCH ON U.S. COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS

The Nonprofit Sector Research Fund (the Fund), a program of the Aspen Institute, was established in 1991 to expand understanding of the nonprofit sector and philanthropy through the support of high quality research.

In this RFP, the Nonprofit Sector Research Fund is prioritizing research on U.S. community foundations, with a particular interest in studies of the operation of community foundations, their role in communities, and public policy related to these institutions. (As the Fund releases additional RFPs, they will be made available on the Fund's website at [www.nonprofitresearch.org](http://www.nonprofitresearch.org). We currently anticipate that an RFP for funding of doctoral dissertation research on a broad range of nonprofit issues will be released in June 2003 with an application deadline of October 1, 2003.)

Community foundations represent a growing and influential component of the foundation universe. According to the Council on Foundations, over 700 community foundations are in operation in the U.S. today. Together, the foundations manage more than \$34 billion in assets. In recent years, community foundations have been one of the fastest growing segments of philanthropy and, in many communities, have taken on increased responsibility for addressing a broad range of local issues.

Unfortunately, research has failed to keep pace with the rapid, recent growth of the community foundation field. Despite the best efforts of foundation leaders, scholars, and others to promote new research, significant gaps in understanding of community foundations remain. By addressing these knowledge gaps, the Fund's new initiative on community foundations will help these organizations improve their performance and assist policymakers in developing more informed public policy regarding these important institutions.

The Fund seeks to bring fresh thinking to the study of the nonprofit sector and philanthropy. To improve the knowledge base of foundation staff, community leaders, and policymakers, the Fund has identified several priority funding areas related to U.S. community foundations. Researchers are invited to submit proposals that address the following or other priority issues:

### PRIORITY ISSUES

#### **Organizational Excellence and Sustainability:**

- *How should "organizational excellence" be defined for community foundations?*
- *What are the stages of development in becoming an effective community foundation, and what strategic choices most affect the direction of that development?*
- *What characteristics and scale best sustain a community foundation and enhance its appropriate role in the community?*
- *What changes in the environment surrounding community foundations are having the greatest impact on these institutions?*
- *What should the organizational structure of community foundations be in the future?*
- *What business models are community foundations using, and how successful have they been? Do community foundations sustain operations through fees from fund management alone? What type and level of fundraising and/or other revenue generation activities must community foundations undertake to support their own operations?*
- *What innovative practices, organizational models, staffing plans, and collaborations are being tried in community foundations?*
- *What is the future of the community foundation field in a competitive market?*

**Governance:**

- *What is the make up of community foundation governing bodies on a variety of dimensions?*
- *How does board composition affect grantmaking and other organizational activities?*
- *Does board composition change during a foundation's life cycle?*
- *What should the community foundation governance structure of the future be?*

**Donor Interests and Community Needs:**

- *How responsive are community foundations to donor interests?*
- *How responsive are community foundations to community needs?*
- *How do community foundations balance responsiveness to donors and responsiveness to communities? How do community foundations educate donors about community needs?*

**Community Foundations Compared to Other Philanthropic and Community Institutions:**

- *How can we appropriately document and evaluate the grantmaking, community-building (non-grantmaking), and donor service activities of community foundations?*
- *How do the activities of community foundations compare to the activities of other philanthropic and community institutions, including United Ways and charitable gift funds?*
- *What is the "value-added," if any, of community foundations?*

Strong consideration will be given to projects – such as studies focused on the development of business models for community foundations – that have the potential to contribute to improved practice or policy, either in the short- or long-term. Projects should have a specific plan to disseminate results widely to foundation and nonprofit leaders and scholars through the highest-quality trade, scholarly, and popular journals, conference presentations, and other communications vehicles.

The Fund seeks applications from researchers with a wide range of viewpoints and encourages applications from research teams that bring together individuals from diverse backgrounds (e.g., researchers and practitioners, researchers from different disciplines). The Fund will consider proposals for empirical research as well as for research that develops or refines theory.

For a bibliography of existing research on community foundations, see [http://www.nonprofitresearch.org/usr\\_doc/CommunityBiblio.pdf](http://www.nonprofitresearch.org/usr_doc/CommunityBiblio.pdf).

**PLEASE SEE BACK COVER FOR APPLICATION PROCEDURES**

## APPLICATION PROCEDURES

### *Eligibility*

Grants will be awarded to institutions and individuals. Proposals from university-based researchers, independent scholars, nonprofit practitioners, and other researchers are welcome.

Research findings should have the potential to generalize to a broad range of organizations. Case studies of single or a few organizations will not be funded, unless the research results are likely to apply to organizations beyond those that are directly studied and have larger significance.

Individuals and organizations that have received a grant from the Nonprofit Sector Research Fund are not eligible for additional awards until after the completion of their previously funded project.

### *Overhead Policy*

General overhead will not be paid for university-based projects. The Fund will consider reasonable overhead for nonprofit applicants, not to exceed 15 percent, but will not cover purchase of equipment.

### *Letters of Intent*

Interested individuals should submit a three-page letter of intent. The letter should include the name, title, and discipline of the principal investigator(s); the main research questions to be addressed; a brief description of the proposed research methodology; a brief description of the audience for the research and how it might be disseminated; and the estimated timeline and budget (detailed timeline and budget are not necessary). Most importantly, the letter must also include a discussion of the project's potential significance to the field, including its potential to inform and influence practice and/or policy in the short- or long-term.

### *Attachments must include:*

- a self-addressed stamped postcard to acknowledge receipt of letter
- a fully completed Application Form (see [www.nonprofitresearch.org](http://www.nonprofitresearch.org))
- curricula vitae of the principal researchers
- a description of the researchers' institutions, if other than a typical university department

## GRANTS PROCESS

Staff and a group of outside evaluators, including both researchers and practitioners, will screen letters of intent. A limited number of applicants will be asked to submit full proposals and will be provided with proposal guidelines and deadlines. The governing Council of the Nonprofit Sector Research Fund will make final decisions on grant awards.

## GRANTS AND REPORTING

Grants will generally range from \$10,000 to \$125,000, depending on the scope of the project. Applications at all funding levels are encouraged.

Applicants who receive a grant will be required to submit a publishable report upon the study's completion. A separate dissemination report will be submitted one year after the research is completed, listing articles, op-eds, presentations, workshops, papers, etc. that resulted from the grant.

## DATES

Applications must be postmarked by July 25, 2003. We expect that awards will be announced in January 2004.

## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information about application requirements, the Fund maintains a frequently asked questions (FAQ) list on the Web at [www.nonprofitresearch.org](http://www.nonprofitresearch.org). From that page, follow the application guidelines link to the FAQ page, which provides detailed answers to common questions about our requirements and processes. A copy of the application form can also be found on the website.

NONPROFIT SECTOR RESEARCH FUND

# APPLICATION FORM:

## Community Foundation Initiative

Please type in the information requested on this application form. If there are more than two authors, please attach a separate sheet.

*Please submit 4 full copies of the letter of intent and all supporting materials.*

### **Other Required Materials**

#### **Please attach:**

1. The letter of intent (required elements described in the Guidelines);
2. A self-addressed stamped postcard to acknowledge receipt of application;
3. Curriculum vitae of the principal researcher(s);
4. A description of the researcher's institution (if other than university);
5. Names, addresses and telephone numbers of three references.

### **Send completed application to:**

Nonprofit Sector Research Fund  
The Aspen Institute  
One Dupont Circle, NW  
Suite 700  
Washington, DC 20036  
ATTN: Jill Blackford

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## **AUTHOR INFORMATION**

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☐ Other .....  
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Ethnicity ..... Gender .....

- ☐ University-Based  
☐ Senior Faculty (Professor/Associate Professor)  
☐ Junior Faculty (Assistant Professor)  
☐ Doctoral Student  
☐ Other .....  
☐ Not University Based

## **PROJECT INFORMATION**

Project Title .....  
Amount Requested \$ .....  
Project Start and End Dates .....  
Other Funding Received. .... Amount \$ .....  
Other Funding Received. .... Amount \$ .....  
Other Funding Applied For ..... Amount \$ .....  
Other Funding Applied For ..... Amount \$ .....

OVER PLEASE

## ONE PARAGRAPH SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT

*In 100 words or less, describe the project and its relevance, for use in proposal review process, etc.*

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### NONPROFIT SECTOR RESEARCH FUND

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*To submit applications or to receive additional information, please contact:*

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